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FREE ACTION PAMPHLETS.

DIRECT ACTION

VERSUS

LEGISLATION.

BY

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TO-DAY, at the end of the nineteenth century, which has been so prolific in discoveries and inventions fraught with the highest possibilities for the physical, moral, and intellectual development of mankind, when one looks around, or merely studies his daily newspaper, one finds references to crying evils, of which the great bulk of one's fellow-citizens have been cognisant of for a number of years back. Notwithstanding our immense advance in the world of mechanics, notwithstanding the fact that the productive power of the individual has been increased a thousandfold, newspaper after newspaper, day after day, record the bitter facts of everyday life, and their constant recurrence have robbed them of all pathetic interest. And these facts are bitter indeed. After a century of phenomenal progress in scientific knowledge, which enables mankind to exploit Nature in a manner never before dreamt of, we are still face to face with evils greater than any previous civilisation has known. In any newspaper, on any day of the year, one may read of crimes so appalling, of privations so terrible, of degradation and misery so horrible, that it almost becomes a matter of doubt whether we are living in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century or in some barbarous island ere the dawn of civilisation.

The reports in our newspapers seem so awful, as they graphically outline some shameless depravity, some heartless cruelty, that, were it not for our own experience of life, we should deem them incredible. Robbery, murder, suicide, deaths from starvation, from overwork, deserted children, evictions—these, and many more equally sad and pitiable, are the daily stock-in-trade of every newspaper in the country; and (the unconscious sarcasm of it all!) we may also read in the same newspaper the speech of some eminent statesman describing the moral grandeur of the nineteenth century and the greatness and wealth of Britain; or of some eloquent divine who makes an impassioned appeal to our pockets on behalf of "the poor heathen of some far-off land living in sin and misery."

The moral grandeur of the nineteenth century has no existence, and it is palpable to most of us who are in any way conversant with the evils around us (and who among us is not?), that the people who are "living in sin and misery" are at home—a fact which is patent to everyone except "eminent statesmen" and "eloquent divines." The evils which surround us are so manifest, so numerous, and so great, that unless some determined effort is made towards their abolition, they will abolish us, just as in the past less gigantic evils have swept away the civilisations preceding ours. These evils have gone on increasing and multiplying, producing new evils, notwithstanding

the fact that very many of them have their opponents, men who are pledged to work for their extinction. Each evil has its special set of opponents, with special plans and methods for its abolition. Certain groups of individuals have combined together to cope with some particular evil which seems greater in their eyes than all others; other groups, who differ from these, are attempting to cope with various other evils. All alike are calling upon Parliament to interfere in this or that particular case, to abolish this or that law, to introduce this or that bill for the supposed betterment of the community. Yet, while all these factions exists, all more or less noisy, the great bulk of the people remain apathetic, have become callous and indifferent, partly by the constant sight of these evils, the constant repetition of the cries, and partly because the fairly comfortable, well-fed portion of the public do not, and apparently cannot, realise the enormity and the awfulness of the evils which have come along with civilisation and the nineteenth century. It is difficult for the man in the west end, surrounded by every comfort, enjoying every pleasure, intellectual, artistic, emotional, to realise the sodden misery and depravity which often exists in the east end. It is almost impossible for the lady reared amid every luxury to realise the vicious degraded lives of the women in the slums. For those people who have never had an unsatisfied want in their lives, it may be impossible to fathom the motives, the circumstances and reasons which drive men to drink and crime and women to shame. But we, who are workers, we know these circumstances and conditions, we feel them exerting all their baleful influence upon us every day of our lives—why, why are we so apathetic, so oblivious of the misery which continually surrounds us, and often is a part of us?

What is the reason for this apathy? Perhaps one cause of it lies in the fact that during this century, and especially in the latter half of it, there has been a steadily increasing feeling that it is no part of the individual's duty to remove, or attempt to remove, the evils which exist. Agitate for their removal he may, but to attempt spontaneously with the help of his fellows, to directly remedy a grievance, this he may not do, without first consulting the State. Any attempt in that direction, we were told again and again, was foredoomed to failure, even if it were not criminal, to indulge in such an attempt. Parliament, we were told, would look after our interests, and the best interests of the people generally, would regulate our lives better than we knew how, and was therefore the proper body whom we ought to approach with our grievances and the plans for their remedying, and of course everyone knows the remarkable rate of speed the Parliamentary machine travels at.

The reign of paternal governmentalism was ushered in and a consequent indifferentism in the people coupled with their childlike trust that in some way or other the government would provide, and no doubt succeed in managing things for the best for everybody, and if it did not—well—it could not be helped; nobody was to blame, and things will always go as they have gone in the past. "*Laissez faire*" said the people, "the government rules; we must obey. They know

what we desire; let us trust them." Sometimes they overthrew a government, but as they always replaced it by another almost identical so far as administration goes, it made little difference and the trust and confidence of the people was merely transferred to different individuals, who worked the same machine in the self-same way as their predecessors.

Thus we may account for the seeming apathy which exists to-day to three or four causes. The taking away from the individual his direct interest in life and in his surroundings, and as a necessary consequence the blunting to a large extent of his moral sense; the teaching that he must never rely upon himself, but must depend upon a small party of men who are elected to do everything, whether they are acquaint with the matter in hand or not, must destroy to a large extent his perception of right and wrong. To be guided, and to depend for guidance upon people who know absolutely nothing of his daily life, his struggles and privations—for it may be safely assumed that 99 per cent. of the House of Commons are woefully ignorant of the various details which make up the worker's life, and which are so blatantly and learnedly discussed there—is to show a lack of individuality, that if not almost criminal, is at least very pathetic. It is certainly unworthy of the descendants of the men who conquered the civil and religious liberty we possess to-day, not by blindly and slavishly following rulers and politicians, but by asserting their own individuality and their own principles, no matter whether the government considered these principles legal or illegal.

This absence of self-reliance which paternalism insists upon may be considered as one of the main obstacles to all genuine progress. There is, of course, as well, the party system of government, which not only deprives men of self-reliance but largely of reason as well; and men shout for this or that particular measure, not because as thoughtful individuals they believe it will be beneficial to the great mass of their fellows and bring increased happiness and well-being to the community, but because it has been recommended by some great party leader, or inscribed on the programme of some particular party. I do not deny that some of the measures may have been beneficial, but I do deny that the great bulk of the people would have voted or shouted for them had they been advanced by some obscure man instead of being supported by the prestige of some great party leader. The reason of the people is thus obscured; it becomes more than ever necessary to think with the multitude, and no man dare stand alone, for, to-day, to slightly revise an old axiom "originality breeds contempt," as those who attempt to initiate innovations will soon find to their cost.

The principle, which party government tacitly asserts, that the majority must be right is decidedly immoral, for right and wrong never were, and never can be determined by the mere counting of noses. A principle must stand or fall by itself, and whether its adherents be few or many, ethically it is still the same. The party system of government denies this and we find this illustrated for us in the fact that in 1880 Mr. Gladstone sent men to prison for advocating a principle

which he himself advocated in 1885. All the difference that existed was a difference in the numbers which supported that principle in 1880 and 1885; and a great portion of the public, at least of his party, completely approved of his actions at both these periods. They had abnegated their own reason completely; sacrificed it to the fetich of party worship. When we take these things into consideration, as well as the proverbial slowness of Parliament, is it any wonder that men, who started life with generous impulses, and noble aspirations, imbued with enthusiasm in the people's cause, become apathetic and either drop out of the fight through sheer weariness of the never-ending "law's delays," or becoming cynical and indifferent, resolve to make the best for themselves, and let their more unfortunate fellows go where they may. And this is comparatively easy. All that is necessary is to go to the assistance of the strongest, and immediately he will bask in the sunshine of popularity (for the multitude can only think in numbers) live in wealth and luxury, die universally lamented, have the honour of a public funeral, and public monuments set up to perpetuate his memory. To abide by his own inmost convictions; to hold high his ideal unsoiled and unspotted would earn for him a life of contumely and abuse terminating probably either in the workhouse or in prison. He had few if any adherents, consequently he must be wrong. This is the manner in which government has taught the people to reason, if they reason at all; as a general rule it is more a matter of emotions than intelligence; and no one knows this better than your politician. Our system condemns an honest man to remain unheard, or converts him into a rogue and a hypocrite. In either case it is sad and pitiable, and, even if that were all, quite sufficient to condemn the parliamentary system and its baneful influence upon the people. It is not all. In short, let us again enumerate the disadvantages of appealing to Parliament to do what finally we must do for ourselves either with or without the permission of Parliament.

The loss of self-reliance; the partial deprivation of reason; the blunting of the moral sense; lack of individuality and initiative; apathy and indifference. When we consider all these results of parliamentary action upon the individual, and the people generally, as well as the fact that so little is achieved, and that little of comparative small value, when we think of the terrible evils abounding in our midst, is it not time as well as advisable to consider whether there may not be other methods which will enable us to abolish these evils, and gain that which we all desire more speedily, and which will, at the same time, develop and strengthen the individuality and self-reliance of the people. As the superstition of Parliament is more or less based upon the superstition of law, it would be well to say a few words on law before criticising Parliament more fully especially in contradistinction to the direct action of the people themselves.

II.

When people speak of the law, they appear to be under the impression that it is something outside of themselves; something above them,

higher than them; something they themselves can neither make nor unmake, but which, rightly or wrongly, they must blindly obey. They imagine that it is a force irresistible, from which there is no appeal, that its dictates, whether just or unjust, still must be obeyed. Few there are who consider whether they are just or unjust; the great majority of the people sincerely believe an action is right or wrong—moral or immoral—just as it happens to be set down in the statute book. Now this is a most immoral attitude to assume. Nothing should be taken for granted; we ought to bring our own intelligence and reason to bear upon any particular question or action, and settle for ourselves, irrespective of the opinions of other men—even if set down in the dusty tomes which crowd the libraries of the Houses of Parliament—its morality or immorality—that is,—whether, or not, it is for the well-being of the individual and the race. That, after all, is the only standard whereby all actions can be tested; and that alone is moral which leads to the increased happiness and well-being of the individual, and as a necessary consequence the race. Until we grasp this fundamental truth, happiness for the great bulk of mankind will be impossible, and the great evils which afflict us to-day, will be perpetuated in a greater or lesser degree. This poverty and mediocrity of thought, this silently accepting the opinions of others ready-made for us in the newspapers as our clothes are in the store, this deference, almost reverential, to the opinion of the majority is largely responsible for the callousness and indifferentism of to-day. This supiness and complacency of the people amid all the hardships of to-day is as terribly sad as the degradation and destitution which prevails and owes its existence to the superstition of law. This supineness and complacency will always exist until we as a people get rid of the superstition of law, a bogey erected by ourselves to worship and adore. We are told that savages in Africa erect their idols and having endowed them with irresistible and all-conquering power and all-embracing knowledge, fall down and worship them. We pride ourselves upon our progress and civilisation, yet in what respect do we differ from these savages. They are held in awe not because the idol really possesses any of these attributes with which they have endowed it, and which only exist in their own minds, but simply because *they* believe so. The European, who has no such superstition, may knock it down, break it in pieces, and recognise it for what it is worth, a piece of wood or stone which owes its power to the undeveloped reason and savage imagination which bow down before it. We, of course, do not bow down to idols of wood or stone, but we endow with superhuman wisdom and power the opinions set down in the Statute book of mere men after all, as if the expression of opinion in the Statute book gave it the wisdom and force which were denied to the expression of opinion in the street. As in the case of the savages so will it be in our own. The law is strong so long as we believe it to be so; when we cease to believe so it will fall to pieces like the idol of the savages. To get rid of this superstition of law it is but necessary to examine it in all its aspects—to trace its origin and development; to study its results in operation. The necessity for law arose from the institution

of slavery and in the evolution from communal property to private property; in the development from the simple family customs of the clans to the establishment of the state. Previous to the institution of slavery, in the frequent internecine wars which were waged between tribes in the early days of man's development, cannibalism was the invariable practice of every clan, and the victors in a battle generally ate the vanquished. But man discovered, after a long interval of course, that it was more profitable to set his prisoners of war to till the soil, engage in various rude industries, than to kill and eat them, and thus slavery was established. The strongest and most powerful fighter in these days generally captured the most slaves, and as the common sense of the clan was decidedly against the slave having little or nothing to do, he was granted so much more land to give employment to all his slaves. The institution of inheritance arising about the same time, wealth, and of course power, were gradually concentrated into a few hands. The necessity for safeguarding this wealth as well as safeguarding one man's (the most powerful warrior generally) position as head of the clan or state against any possible attack from those who were more unfortunate, and from the slaves either captured or born on the domains of the lord, led to the institution of law. The church, stepping in, received large grants of land from this warrior, and bestowed in return a religious sanction to the enactments of the king or lord. The bond of union finally established between church and state—that is, stripped of all fine words, rapacious priests on the one hand and the robber barons on the other—the people steeped in ignorance and superstition, blindly obeying their priests, it was easy to establish the connecting link between heavenly and earthly law, and the penalties for disobeying either, both here and in the world to come, were such that only the boldest and most indomitable spirits had even the courage to criticise the law. From this arose the divine right of kings, the infallibility of priests and the great bulk of the human race, with few exceptions, here and there, now and then, grovelled in abject slavery before their divinely-inspired masters and pastors. It took the human race centuries to awaken from this sleep of ignorance and superstition, and the divine right of kings and infallibility of priests were shattered for ever. But ideas often change their names while their essence remains the same. Mankind is always prone, like the Israelites of old, to return to his old idolatrous worship, while at the same time he deludes himself into believing it is something else by inventing a new label for it.

The divinity which formerly hedged a king has now been tranferred to law and to parliament. The aim of both institutions is the same however—to safeguard the interests of a small minority against any possible attack from the unfortunate majority. The result is the same as in the middle ages—wealth, luxury, and power, culture, the enjoyment of literature and art, the study of the sciences for the few, and poverty, misery, and degradation for the many.

We find, therefore, in studying the origin and development of law, that it owes its existence to robbery and murder. It is a familiar axiom that the "sword must keep what the sword has gained." We find this well

exemplified in the history of our country. It required more than the sword to keep the plunder robbed from the people; the gallows and cannon, the stake and scaffold were impressed into the service of the law to "keep what the sword had gained." Crimes too atrocious to mention have been committed by the state in the name of law and order, and with the full approval and blessing of the church. Who has not heard of the massacres of St. Bartholomew and Glencoe? Yet from these days, and long before them, down to the execution of Wilson and the radical martyrs of Scotland, the Peterloo massacre, the shooting of miners at Featherstone, of peasants at Mitchelstown, what a horrible record of crimes is unfolded to us, perpetrated by this law which is supposed to exist to suppress crime. What nameless sickening barbarities were inflicted upon those who were unfortunate enough to come within its cruel grasp. What devilish engines of torture, constructed with almost fiendish ingenuity to rend asunder the limbs of the unhappy victim or tear his flesh into piece-meal; these were the means and methods for maintaining "order" in society. Of course, we no longer use these instruments of torture; but the law did not consign these relics of savagery freely into our museums. The force of public opinion, an enlightened public conscience. these and these alone compelled the sweeping away of a system which comprised these diabolical methods of punishment. Torture must always be more or less incorporated with law. Witness the revolting details of our prison system published from time to time, and the demands made by many judges in England to revert to flogging as a punishment for crime. Thus even our judges are brutalised and degraded by their calling; their minds warped and twisted, the spring of human sympathy dried up by studying too much law and too little humanity. Crimes! You talk of the crimes of the individual! The crimes committed by individuals are as a drop of water in the ocean compared to the crimes perpetrated by the law.

What respect can we give to an institution which, as everyone will know who cares to study, owes its inception to the murder and robbery of the people; its perpetuation to the slavery and ignorance of the people. It may have changed its name and form; its administrators may now be many where formerly they were few; it may no longer be the caprice of an individual, but the joint opinion of a number, still in every essential it is the same. The institution of monopoly in land and capital, and the enslavement of the people gave rise to the necessity for law. For the safeguarding of a minority, monopolising all the means of life, it has existed all through the ages; in defence of the same minority it exists to-day.

Of course, I am aware that some philosophers contend that government and law arose from the desire among men to maintain the equilibrium between individuals, to avoid strife and disputes, and to promote peace and harmony. Each individual, we are told, sacrificed to a certain extent his liberty of action, agreed to maintain and abide by the law, in exchange for the guarantee of life, freedom to labour, and to pursue happiness within certain well defined limits.

Now, while this contention may be advanced with some appearance

of truth in regard to countries such as the United States or France, since the Revolution, it certainly cannot suffer analysis, nor the light of historical research in regard to this country; and even in the United States and France, or in other republican countries, where Republicanism is of comparative recency, it is far more apparent than real. An analysis and criticism of the circumstances existing in these countries when Republicanism was instituted, will prove that after all, law and government owe their inception to practically the same causes as they do in this country. But even if this were so, even if law were the outcome of the people's desire to live in peace and harmony, and even if they had agreed to maintain the law and abide by it in order to produce this desired result, there surely ought to be reciprocal obligations and reciprocal duties. Are we not entitled to say that a bargain ought not to be one-sided? If one of the parties fails to implement his agreement, it is time for the other to withdraw. Is it the case to-day that law, in return for our acquiescence and unhesitating obedience, offers us life, freedom to labour and to pursue happiness? We know it does not. Have we not dozens of parties protesting, agitating against some part of the law which deprives some portion of the people of those fundamental conditions which law is supposed to exist to guarantee? If the law were fulfilling the obligations with which those theorists have endowed it, the widespread misery, and the consequent discontent and unrest of to-day would not exist. But theory and practice often vary, and thus it is that while theoretically and collectively all the law officers and the organised forces of the Government are our servants, individually and practically the meanest policeman that walks the streets is our master, and can compel our obedience to his behests. One look around any of our cities, a glance at the slums and all the horrors they contain, are surely proof sufficient that the law has failed to fulfil its obligations.

Why should we stand by ours?

If, as these theorists maintain, the wellbeing of the community gave rise to law; if the primary object of all rules and regulations was the protection of the life and property of all members of society, within a certain well-defined area, the wellbeing of the community must be above law, of more importance than law—not of less, as so many of us are apt to consider to-day. This is the whole point. The life, happiness, and wellbeing of a community, being of more importance than law, ought never to be sacrificed to this savage and barbarous fetish worship of law.

But let us leave the theorists to the enjoyment of their theory. Enough has been written, even from their standpoint, to question the right of the law to impose itself upon us, and to demand the religious awe and implicit obedience which it receives from the great bulk of the people. We know that the law had not such a peaceful origin as these individuals would maintain. It began in the Dark Ages, and ever since then Church and State, for reasons of their own, have both conspired to keep the people in leading-strings, to darken their minds and fetter their reason by teachings, from early childhood, of the

majesty, the invincibility, and infallibility of the law. But the human race is awakening once more from its sleep of centuries.

This century, which has been so rich in inventions and discoveries has submitted every institution to the test of keen examination. No theory, either of religion or government, social or economic has been too sacred to escape the pitiless criticism of the nineteenth century, and we may be sure the law has been compelled to stand this ordeal as well. It has evolved shattered and broken. Like the divine right of kings and the idol worship of savages it is all powerful until you question its *raison d'etre*, its right to impose itself upon you, its origin; then like the superstitions which have preceded it, it falls to the ground. With the disappearance of its divinity people will recognise it for what it is—a collection of rules and regulations promulgated by men who are long since dead, and who were probably considerably less informed on many things than the child at the board school to-day; that these rules and regulations are only man-made, based upon the opinions of men, (very fallible and interested) and are no more worthy the awe and reverence they inspire than the opinions of any other fairly intelligent man. Even if we grant that these rules and regulations may have been necessary and beneficial in the age in which they were promulgated that is no reason that they are necessary and beneficial to-day. Stage-coaches were necessary and beneficial in the eighteenth century, but to revert to them to-day would mean the complete paralysis of the country.

We must remember that progress and expansion is the law of evolution; that we have no right to bind the future, nor has the past had any right to bind us. Conditions and circumstances are always changing, with the spread of education and the development of intelligence, necessitating the continual readjustment of social relations. Laws prevent this readjustment by erecting a hard and fast barrier, past which we must not travel. Well, you may attempt to dam up a river, but sooner or later it will reach the sea by breaking your barrier and possibly flooding the surrounding country as well. The human race, like a river, is always wending its way, now tortuously and turbid, now impetuously and straight toward its ideal, dim and undefined, perhaps, yet still its ideal—happiness for all. You may attempt to bar its progress, but your barriers will be broken, you yourself will be swept away by the stream which you are foolish enough to imagine you can divert from its course. The French Revolution is an example of the result of attempting to dam for ever the stream of human progress. Its lessons are surely apparent to everyone; its repetition is to horrible to contemplate. Has not Carlyle asked:—"Is one French Revolution not enough? You will have two; you will have just as many as are necessary." Let us hope not. Let us learn from the mistakes of the past and no longer pile up laws to block the march to the future. It is not more laws which is desired, but less, and if we consider how existing laws operate on the people, and that there are upwards of 400,000 laws on the statute book—enough to keep a man studying for the next few hundred years if he wished to become acquaint with them all—it is surely apparent

to all that the law is impotent for good, and is only necessary because of the propertied interests behind it. Look at it in operation to-day and you find this the case; that it has not changed its character one iota during a progress of centuries.

Take every dispute which has been waged between employer and employed since the century began, and in every case you find the law ranged on the side of the employer. In many cases all the armed forces of the government are placed at the disposal of the employing classes to terrorise the men back to their employment at their old rates, or at a reduction. Again and again striking workmen have been bayoneted and shot as at Featherstone because they have had the audacity to protest against the conditions imposed upon them by the employers.

The whole machinery of law has been utilised especially during the late Engineers' strike to send men to prison for offences that were absolutely trivial and scarcely worth the attention of any serious man, even if the men *were* guilty of such offences, which in very many cases is extremely doubtful. To look at a blackleg, according to many Sheriffs in Scotland, was a very heinous crime and punished with severity, "without the option of a fine."

If, after having gone on strike for some months, during which you discovered that the law afforded you no protection from the rapaciousness and cruelty of your employers—that, in fact, all its strength and power were used against you; or, being laid up by a long and severe illness, your rent has fallen into arrears, your landlord or factor hands you his ultimatum that unless a certain part be forthcoming on a certain date you will require to leave the house. In vain you protest against his conditions; in vain you point out that it is impossible for you to go outside for a few weeks yet; you plead with him to grant you time and you will pay up every penny when you get back to work. All is in vain; he is inexorable, and he has the law at his back. If you refuse to quit, the law officers, in the shape of policemen, will enforce the landlord's commands. If you are unable to walk out, they will carry you, deposit you on the street with your starving wife and children, Without a home or shelter, your thoughts will be bitter on the subjects of law and landlord, and "man's inhumanity to man," but your troubles are not over yet. If unable to find shelter, either from your friends or by securing another house, you will probably be arrested for attempting to sleep outside, and sent to prison as a vagabond "without any visible means of support." Thus it is the law may degrade an honest workman into a vagabond. You thought the law existed for your protection! Ah! no, my friends, the law exists for the protection of the powerful and great, but not for you. If, in your starving condition, in which, with the assistance of the law, your employer and landlord have placed you, you steal or attempt to steal a loaf, you will probably be sent to prison for some time. On emerging, you will find it almost impossible to find employment, and gradually you will drift into the ranks of the criminal classes. The law which you respected has made you a criminal—for, without its assistance, your landlord and employer would be absolutely powerless.

If, on the other hand, you had been born in a higher rank of society, you might have become a company promoter. Under these circumstances you could steal—not a loaf, or a shilling or two, but thousands and millions, and the law would take you by the hand, smile upon you, admire you; you would be its ideal of what a great man should be. It would be immaterial to the law that, in acquiring your wealth, you had sacrificed the lives and happiness of thousands; that the corner in wheat which made your "pile" brought starvation, misery, and suffering upon innocent women and hapless little children. You *have* made it, by what means it matters little, and the law will respect you, protect you, even though you bestow upon it the contempt which it so well deserves. Steal a loaf, and you will earn for yourself the title "low scoundrel"; steal a million and you are a "highly respected gentleman, of undoubted respectability," and the front pews of our churches and the front benches of our legislature will be opened to you. If you desire a deer forest, the law is at your beck and call. For you it will depopulate a part of the Highlands of Scotland; deport the people to Canada or elsewhere; tear down their homes, so that your pleasure may not be interfered with by the huts and cots of the crofters. If you be wealthy, the law exists for you; for, after all, the Government, which enforces it, is merely the executive arm of the capitalist and wealthy classes. To protect a class, a minority of the people was the cause of its inception; to protect the same class in its enjoyment of the wealth stolen from the people it lives to-day; with the abolition of monopoly in the means of life it will disappear.

There are, of course, men sincere and honest, who, thoroughly alive to the origin and development of law, and to its evil effects to-day, yet believe it is necessary for the wellbeing of society; that without it conditions would become too awful to contemplate. To claim that without law crimes of almost every description against persons would become rampant, is to show a very superficial knowledge of human nature. To credit law for the general good feeling which exists among the masses of men, and, taking the population into consideration, the remarkably small number of crimes of violence committed, is to exhibit a woeful ignorance of human evolution and development. It is an axiom that every society has the criminals it deserves, and, as Kropotkin observes, society, which shares in the glory of its geniuses, must also share in the shame of its criminals. When one takes into consideration the many agencies combining to degrade and demoralise the people: when one considers the privations and sufferings endured by the majority of the workers; when one thinks that, after a life of toil, scandalously inadequately remunerated, the remaining few years of life may be passed within a bastile which the people look upon with even more horror than prison itself, the wonder is, not that crimes are so many, but that they are so few. When the reward for long hours at arduous labour is so small and so uncertain; when often honest labour means the contracting of foul diseases, as in our chemical factories; when it means the early death, or the premature ageing of a man, is it any wonder that some of our workers prefer a life of crime to this so-called honest employment?

Take away the horrible economic conditions which drive men to crime, take away your lawyers, judges, and policemen, who live upon crime, and crime will largely disappear.

The law does not prevent crime. It may punish the individual who commits a criminal act by sending him to prison, but that is all. This punishment is supposed to act as a deterrent upon the individual concerned and upon others, but it is very rarely that a man who once has spent a year or two in prison leads an honest life when he is free; he invariably returns sooner or later to prison. The prison discipline and the prison life reduce the man to a mere automaton, devoid of all will, self-control, or self-reliance, and thus when he quits prison helpless, despised by the "respectable," dogged by detectives, driven out of any honest employment he may have secured, he falls back upon the old associates, who, after all, are the only people who do *not* look upon him with suspicion, and till death, probably in some prison, he is a criminal. Society has made him what he is, and punishes him for its own folly. That punishment is not a deterrent, nor does prison reform a man can be proved in any court, where the majority of prisoners tried have already spent one, two, three, five and ten years of their lives in prison. It is also a fact that in any city there are more murders committed within a few months after an execution, than within the same time preceding it. The report of an execution, with all its ghastly and barbarous formalities, is read with avidity by some in whose brains the dividing line between sanity and insanity is very faintly delineated. All their morbid instincts are pandered to, as they gloat over the horrible details, and is it any wonder when the law has so little respect for human life, that these people, mentally unhinged, should have as little. No, punishment is no deterrent from crime, and we must look for some other cause than law for the remarkable absence of crime on the part of the masses.

We find it here. In primeval times, owing to his weakness and helplessness, face to face with nature and wilder and stronger animals, the closest possible association was imperative for man in the struggle for existence. Actions, at first voluntary, after constant repetition became involuntary, that is they became habits. These habits transmitted to offspring, and constantly repeated by them and so on to each new generation are so deeply impressed upon the brain as to become ineradicable.

If, to-day, we consider instinctively that certain actions are moral, and, if we possess certain moral habits, it is because thousands of our ancestors found they were necessary for the welfare of the race and preservation of the species, and accordingly practised them. We are the product of the past, and have inherited those feelings, whose expression in actions, once voluntary and laboured, now involuntary and spontaneous, were necessary to our ancesstors for the survival and development of the race. Thus, this close association of primeval days, carried on for probably thousands of years, during which mutual aid was a stern necessity, has developed within us the feeling of solidarity, which has became an instinct. During the long period when co-operative thought and effort were imperative there evolved

the idea—never defined perhaps, yet existing, prompting many deeds from these early ages till now—that an injury inflicted upon one was an injury inflicted upon all.

Even to-day, in the nineteenth century, with its "devil take the hindmost" philosophy, we find many examples of mutual help. of sacrifices made on behalf of others, which testify to the endurance of this principle within the minds of men. The Christian religion, prostituted as it is, owes its vitality and influence to its affirmation of these principles of equality and solidarity, practised so long by the race. In the slums, in the street, we find them practised daily by men who never ask the reason for acting in this way, but simply act thus, because they cannot act otherwise.

The man who jumps into the river to rescue a drowning person feels at once the necessity for the act, and having the power, he acts spontaneously. This feeling of necessity was born ages back, when society was far less complexed, and man saw clearly how indissolubly the individual was linked with his fellows. This feeling of solidarity, of mutual aid, the desire to save people from pain, to bestow happiness, exists to-day, weakened a little, perhaps—owing to our commercial system—but still strongly; and it is to this, and not to law, that we must ascribe the fact that so comparatively few crimes are committed; and on law, on our social and economic conditions, we must lay the responsibility for these. Without this feeling of solidarity society would be impossible. To imagine that without policemen, judges, and gaolers all order would vanish, and murder and rapine would become general, is to make a very false estimate of human nature. If human nature were so "despicable and wicked" as some people imagine, one policeman would scarcely be a restraint upon a thousand people (which is about the proportion in cities); and even they themselves, actuated by the same feelings, would be as likely to run amuck as the rest of the people. Even granting the policemen were a restraint, still they could not compel the many kindnesses rendered by strangers to strangers spontaneously, without any hope of reward. No, it is not to law and policemen that we owe the (taking the economic conditions into consideration) surprisingly good feeling which exists to-day among the people, and whose existence necessitates so few policemen in comparison to the population. The very acquiescence of the people to laws and conditions which are crushing them is sufficient to prove the intense desire among mankind to live in peace and harmony with their fellows rather than in strife. This feeling will always exist among men. The desire for mutual help and mutual sympathy has always been a part of human nature, and will always endure; without it, no matter how many laws were in force, society would have perished long ago. It is this, not law, which welds human society together. With the abolition of our commercial system this feeling of solidarity will be developed and strengthened, and the law will be seen in its true light as the enforced mandates of interested men who have wrongfully acquired the wealth that should be free to all.

Looked at in this light, stripped of all its divinity, a superstition

dissipated, why should we fall down and worship it still? Let us be men, and decide for ourselves the morality, or immorality (never mind the legality or illegality) of any action, as our reason, intelligence, and experience dictate, and having decided, be prepared to act or abide by that decision.

III.

Having seen that the law owes its origin to murder and plunder, and its perpetuation to the enslavement of the people; that it is responsible for most of the misery and unhappiness in our midst, as well as for the oblique moral vision of a great portion of the community, let us see if anything really has been gained, or can be gained, by parliamentary methods—that is, to continually obey a bad law while agitating for its legal abolition.

Without considering the fact that the more people obey a bad law the more they habituate themselves to it, they deteriorate morally, and the more impossible it becomes to legally alter it, what can be done through Parliament that could not be done much speedier and more thoroughly by simply ignoring Parliament and regulating our own lives ourselves?

The rise of Parliament dates practically from the Civil War. The discovery of America with its immense stores of wealth had given birth to a new body of men among the people. These were traders who, in exchanging goods between this country and America, rapidly amassed fortunes. At the same time, many of the aristocracy, deeply in debt, succeeded in breaking many of the last links which bound the country to feudalism by selling their estates or part of them to these rich newcomers who had risen from the ranks of the people. The power of this trading or commercial class gradually increased till, not content with having the whole trade of the country in their hands, as well as much of the land, they desired—to still further increase that wealth—to gain supreme power. To reach that object they decided to make Parliament, which up till then was practically non-existent, so far as the Government of the country was concerned, the sole dictator of the affairs of the nation, and to reduce the monarchy to a mere figure-head.

Then began the struggle between the King and the aristocracy on the one hand and the middle class or the parliamentary party on the other—a struggle which developed into a civil war lasting several years. Parliament, of course, emerged successfully. The middle class had the economic control of the country, and by that, and by promising certain concessions to the people, they succeeded in gaining the support of the majority of the nation. Yet in this struggle for supremacy Parliament, which stands to-day for all that is legal, violently broke every legal enactment of the time, outraged all the "law and order" of the period to arrive at political power. From then till now the middle class has reigned supreme; but what of the working class? The revolution which lifted the middle class to place and power left them practically the same as in the old days prior to the Civil War.

The revolution had done nothing for them. The Parliament instituted by the middle class to protect themselves against the king and the aristocracy, without giving liberty to the people, was found eminently suited to the interests of that class. It was a lever which freed them for ever from the domination of an autocracy, while at the same time it left them the masters of slaves, whose obedience they had the power to compel. Parliament came with commercialism, just as the factory system came with it. It is permeated with the ideas of commercialism, and its laws, like all our manufactured goods, are produced in a factory on the well known factory plan. It is an institution based upon class privilege, and like the law owes its existence to monopoly in land and capital on the one hand, and to landless, capitalless workers on the other. Instituted as it was by the middle class for the middle class, how can it be maintained that such an institution can further the interests of the whole people? At the best, it can only impose another class upon the workers who may to a slight extent modify the present conditions. Bound up as it is, however, with the economic conditions which gave it birth, it will be compelled to disappear with the commercial system. For the middle class it lives and acts; to further their interests is the only reason for its existence, and these interests are diametrically opposed to the best interests of the working class. Owing to its very nature, it cannot possibly further the interest and wellbeing of the workers. It exists to defend privilege and monopoly, and it can only be by the abolition of these that happiness, wellbeing, peace, and harmony can come to the people.

Even if we examine it practically as well as theoretically, in operation as well as in the abstract, what do we find? What does the history of Parliament for the last fifty years teach us? Failure after failure. After fifty years of agitation how many points of the Charter have been gained? Have we gained annual parliaments, payment of members, abolition of the House of Lords, land nationalisation? Not one. And yet, after all, these are merely political reforms, which would have no effect on the great bulk of the people. Over and above these are the demands for reform in the social and economic conditions of our times. The cry of misery which goes up every day from every large city is unheeded; the wasted, broken lives are unnoticed; the haggard women who deal in shame, and the starving children who haunt the gutter, may perish in their degradation so far as Parliament is concerned. It does not exist to protect these. After sixty years of the reformed Parliament scarcely an evil of any consequence has been abolished, and many of them have been accentuated. The tide of human misery, reaching a higher level every year, threatens to sweep away our civilisation, while Parliament sits solemnly engaged in hair-splitting and word-twisting. Nero fiddled while Rome was burning, but Parliament, without even the desire, the energy, or brains to do that, sits and gapes while the misery of the people is intensified day after day. It can do nothing even if it desired, hampered as it is with a bundle of antiquated regulations and effete customs—good enough, possibly, for the days when our ancestors travelled in coaches at the rate of twenty or thirty miles a day, but out of date in the nineteenth

century, with all its social and industrial complexities; utterly unable to cope with the age, and generally lagging half a century behind the thoughts of the time.

Take the *personnel* of the House of Commons into consideration and imagine, if you can, if the interests of lawyers, stockbrokers, landlords, and employers are likely to be in harmony with those of the people. They have no serious desire to solve the social problem. The most they desire is to maintain the *status quo*. Who does not remember the enthusiasm which swayed the great mass of the people after the London dock strike and the publication of the revelations regarding the arduous precarious existence of the dockers, and the miserable pittance they received. The force of public opinion became so strong that every one of us thought a new era was about to dawn. But alas! the Government, fully alive to the possibilities of the situation, met the public demand for better conditions for the workers by appointing the Labour Commission, which, long after the public interest had died away, reported, and—that was all that was done. The whole question of better conditions, more leisure, and higher wages for the workers was completely shelved, and the employers were enabled to breathe freely once more. Instances of this kind can be multiplied again and again. People—sincere, honest, and earnest—have agitated again and again to abolish some particular evil, and perhaps, having succeeded in gaining the attention of the public, discover that owing to the supreme lethargy and indifference of Parliament, this attention has been diverted, and the opportunity for effecting a reform practically lost for ever.

In effecting a reform by legislative methods it is necessary to go through this procedure. In the first place it is necessary to agitate in order to convince the body of the people that a great public evil exists and to urge upon it the desirability of doing something towards its abolition. This having been done—public opinion being aroused, it is now necessary to convince a body of men as to the existence of this evil, as to the existence of a strong desire to remove it, and the methods to remove it. After some time, one party of politicians take the matter up, and the people who have agitated for years and years ere the question entered the regions of "practical politics," (which practically means that there may be sufficient votes to make it worth a party's attention) are now congratulating themselves upon the success of their long and persistent agitation. But their congratulations are rather early yet. The political party which has taken up the matter may not be strong enough to introduce a bill; they may be in opposition. Two or three years pass and a general election comes which returns this party to power. But difficulties are not over yet. So many other things "block the way," that it may be a few more years before the bill is introduced. The original agitators now getting into the "sere and yellow leaf" imagine their time of triumph has come at last. Not yet, however. The other party—the party in opposition—has to be convinced of its necessity. It takes time to do that. Convinced of its necessity they will, however, disagree upon every possible method that can be adopted. Clause by clause, line by

line, word by word, the bill is fiercely contested, until after the lapse of a few more years it becomes law, but so mutilated and patched up as to become almost unrecognisable to its originators, who, now hoary with years far beyond that usually alloted to man, drop into their graves, from agony and shame at the sight of this miserable abortion which is presented to them in their old age, as the child of their youth.

This farcial method of treating great questions cannot go on. It may do well enough on the comic opera stage when dealing with imaginary grievances, but life is too short and the ills of life too real to be treated in this manner. Some other method must be adopted if we are to cope successfully with the crying evils of to-day. Even if the workers elect representatives of their own class how long can their honesty and good faith be guaranteed? Is it possible to guarantee their honesty at all? Consider the methods a man must adopt if he desires to represent a constituency in parliament. Long before he is elected he has degenerated morally. He must be an adept at wire-pulling, intriguing and flattering. He must make himself agreeable to the majority of his constituents and to do this he must in many cases suppress his own convictions, and utter opinions which are not his; bind himself to vote for measures which he really believes will be detrimental to the best interests of the country; promise anything and everything whether it can be had or not, so long as they send him to parliament, it is immaterial. Is it likely that a man who goes through this slough of lying and chicanery will be of great service to the people? Is it likely that a man of this calibre will take up a righteous but unpopular cause and in the name of the people press forward with it to the bitter end? Is it likely that this man will be true even to the promises he has made and make some endeavour to fulfil them? How can we believe it? Is the lesson of contemporary politics wasted upon us? Is it not the case that a man, steeped in lying and intrigue, will be just as likely to desert the cause of the people when it serves his own vanity or his purse. No one can touch pitch without being defiled, and you cannot expect a man to wallow in the filthy mire of politics without becoming degenerated morally. No politician can be an honest man. It would not *pay*. The politician desires notoriety, fame, place and power for himself. To gain these it is necessary to capture votes, and whether the methods be shady or otherwise does not matter.

Thus measures are passed and promises made, not because they may be of real utility to the people, but because they command votes. And after all this intriguing and wirepulling, lying and cheating, how do the people stand? As they were—or worse. They are merely the pawns on the chessboard, the counters to play with, that a small section of men may gain control of the destiny of the nation, and use that control towards enriching themselves.

Working-men representatives can be no better than those who have preceded them. The same corrupt influences are at work, the same immoral methods *must* inevitably be adopted. When you enter the political field success is the first aim, and your principles must be cut down or extended to accomplish it. Either way your honesty is gone,

and once on the down grade, like other Tribunes of the People, you will probably end by being an oppressor as well. Our employers of labour who have risen from the ranks are certainly not noted for their generous treatment of the class from which they sprang; and we have no reason to suppose that working-men representatives, rising to their position by such questionable methods, are any more likely to consider the interests of the people first and their own private interests last.

Let us also take into consideration the duration of Parliament and the average life of the worker. The average duration of Parliament is six years, the average life of the worker is twenty-nine. He cannot possibly vote before he is twenty-one at the very earliest; it may be five or six years later before he is entitled to vote, and possibly three or four after that again before he has the opportunity. We may therefore justly conclude that few workers have the opportunity of voting more than twice in a parliamentary election. When you take into consideration the fact that the vote is often lost for some years owing to change of residence, non-payment of rates, etc., I don't think this is overstepping the mark. Thus our direct contact with those who move the strings of government is so slight, that we have really no control over them at all. They are our masters! In their hands lies all the power which, at election times, they are politic enough to say is ours.

When we consider the dilatoriness of Parliament, its phenomenal capacity for doing nothing, the untrustworthiness of the men who compose it, as well as the fact that so little has been accomplished by parliamentary methods, and that little owing more to the strong force of public opinion outside than to Parliament itself, how can sensible men still expect any slight modification of the present social and economic conditions, to say nothing of the solution of the social problem to come through such an agency.

Look at the case of Ireland. No nation in the world has relied more upon Parliament, nor made more persistent Parliamentary agitation to gain better conditions than Ireland. Since the beginning of the century the whole population, rich and poor, all classes and conditions, have been rabid politicians to a man; and, yet, notwithstanding it all, we know how little Irish politicians have achieved; and that little was accomplished not because of parliamentary agitation, but through agitation outside of a very different sort. The history of Ireland since the beginning of the century has been one long essay on the futility of political action.

No, it is not by Parliament that we can better the conditions of the workers. Parliament as we have already seen is merely an institution designed to advance the interests of the middle-class, while at the same time it deceives the people with the semblance of freedom and power. To trust in Parliament is to trust on a broken reed. It can do nothing for the workers and it has no intentions of doing anything. It has deceived the workers in the past; it has destroyed to a large extent their initiative. It inculcates the blighting idea that a man's duty to himself and to society is at an end when he puts a cross to a ballot paper and drops it into the proper box. This pernicious

doctrine, that a man is in no way responsible for the misery and suffering that exist is responsible for all the apathy and indifference of to-day. We *are* responsible, each one of us, and it is our duty as men no longer to be content with crossing a paper, but to think for ourselves; to discover, if we possibly can, the means and methods to ameliorate the condition of the people.

IV.

Now let us contrast this slow, laborious and uncertain method for securing the abolition or removal of the evils in our midst with that of the direct action of the people themselves. After all direct action is no novelty. It has been practised again and again with more or less success; a success that certainly justifies its consideration as a method to effectually promote the happiness and well-being of the people. It means simply this—the firm determined attitude on the part of the people to assert their rights and to pursue happiness whether such assertion or pursuit be considered illegal or not. As we have already pointed out law and government have nothing divine about them; that law after all is merely the opinions of men inscribed in the statute book; that Parliament itself, which is now legality par excellence, owes its position to illegality of the worst sort—revolution. Parliament, therefore, whether it be that of this country, or of the United States or of France is merely illegality legalised, and now practises that which it revolted against—the usurpation of the right to determine the life and conditions of the people. We have no wish, still less reason to condemn these revolts. We recognise in them the principle ingrained in humanity, covered though it may be by the veneer of respect for law, that great questions are not decided upon their legality or illegality. At periods such as these the dusty tomes of law are cast aside and man stands up erect and decides by his own reason, knowledge, and experience the course of action he ought to pursue.

In these circumstances men do not argue whether an action is lawful or not, but upon the broader ground—whether it will conduce to the happiness of the people or not. John Hampden, when he refused to pay the ship money, committed an illegal action; but his refusal was based upon his denial of the right to impose this tax upon him. Perhaps there is nothing grander in history than the action of Richard Cameron riding into Sanquhar at the head of twenty men, affixing a proclamation to the market cross denouncing Charles II. as a bloody tyrant, throwing off their allegiance and refusing to recognise his laws. A most illegal action! Twenty-one men defying the British Empire! And yet the freedom we possess to-day, civil and religious, such as it is, owes its existence to the determined, uncompromising, illegal action of these men. In the seventeenth century, unlike the nineteenth century, men's brains were not so befogged by the musty cobwebs of law. These men did not argue upon the legality or illegality of their actions. The decision that an action was moral, in the interests of the people and of human

happiness made its commission imperative. Their own consciences were the final arbiters. Here, of course, we had direct action carried to the extreme; an extreme which has not been necessary since, and is still less necessary to-day.

It is, however, unnecessary to go back to these days to find examples of the successful attainment of an object by the direct action of the people; we can find many examples in the present century, even in our own day. To-day, when one considers the amount of respect which is paid to our trade unions, it is difficult to realise that at one time, comparatively recent, these same trade unions were outwith the pale of the law, and law and government did their utmost to crush them. Again and again men were sent to prison, under the old Conspiracy Acts, for daring to assert the right of combination to protect themselves from the rapacity and cruelty of the employers. And how did the trades unionists of these days reply to this persecution? Did they look at the question from a *legal* point of view and submit to the law, instead of being guided by a higher principle than that of legality? Did they petition Parliament after Parliament? Approach M.P. after M.P., humbly, supplicantly, to ask their aid to assist them to obtain legal recognition, and the free exercise of their undeniable rights? Had they done so, our trade unions would never have been legalised even yet. The trades unionists of these days were not so imbued with respect for law as they are in ours. The law having refused to recognise their unions, they refused to recognise the right of the law to interfere with them. Again and again, in the face of the law, they asserted their right to combine; and so persistent was their agitation, so determined was the attitude they took up, that the government, powerless in the face of such energy and the rising tide of popular discontent, fearful of revolution, seeing no other way out of the difficulty they had made for themselves, legalised the trades unions—that is, by Act of Parliament gave them permission to act as they always had been acting without Parliamentary sanction—and allayed the agitation. All that Parliament did was to withdraw a prohibition which they had no right to attempt to enforce, and they have no right to expect the thanks of the working classes for an Act of this description wrung from them by compulsion. Parliament did not form the trades unions, as some of us are apt to consider to-day; these were formed in spite of Parliament, and the whole agitation, in which men were victimised and imprisoned, was caused by the meddlesome interference of Parliament in the affairs of private individuals who were quite competent to manage their own affairs.

Thus we find that many of our trades unions which are so respectable to-day owe their origin and their continued existence, not to Parliamentary methods, but to a firm determination to assert a principle whether that principle was legal or illegal, so long as they deemed it in the best interests of the class to which they belonged. A few years of this uncompromising attitude, accompanied by persistent agitation, and the fight was won. Contrast this with the many questions which have endeavoured unsuccessfully to gain the attention of Parliament during the last fifty years.

I have already mentioned the barren results which Ireland has obtained through political agitation; an agitation carried on persistently for about a century, and yet it is only a few months since we read harrowing accounts of the terrible poverty and misery of the peasants on the west coast of Ireland. A century of political action with nothing to show for it but a record of speeches. Contrast this with the direct action of the inhabitants of Tipperary in County Clare. Here the "plan of campaign" was inaugurated and the peasants determined to pay no rent whatever until they received a reduction. In a few months they were allowed, not only a reduction, but all arrears of rent were wiped off as well. The "no rent" plan of campaign showed signs of spreading all over Ireland and had it not been for the Irish Nationalist members backed by the Pope, this method would have effectually solved the whole Irish question. No better method could possibly have been adopted, for a determination on the part of the whole people to withhold all rent, while at the same time carefully abstaining from all demonstration or violence would have rendered the government and Parliament practically helpless, and the complete solution of the whole Irish question would have been the only way out of the difficulty. The Nationalist members were fully aware of this, and of course, desiring to retain their positions they succeeded (with the help of the Pope) in dissuading the people from carrying this policy of direct action to its ultimate conclusion. The result of their action we see to-day. Home Rule is further off from being realised than it was in the days of the plan of campaign. Since then the world has witnessed the rupture of the Irish party, and the politicians who were so eager to redress the wrongs of Ireland *themselves*, rather than allow the people to do so by their own action, are now busily engaged discussing personalities and bandying words with each other, while the lot of the people remains practically unchanged. Only when the people of Ireland learn the lesson which so many years of political action and so many failures ought to have taught them, that it is not by trusting politicians but by asserting themselves that the day of Irish freedom shall dawn.

We have also examples in this country of the success of direct action. In Leicester and one or two other towns in England, where there is a strong feeling against vaccination, the Vaccination Acts are a dead letter. The force of public opinion is so great, the number of people who refuse to obey the law in this respect so large, that the authorities, finding themselves unable to enforce the Acts, have ceased altogether from attempting to enforce them.

Many more cases similar could be cited, but these are, I think, sufficient to prove the contention that the direct action of the people themselves is a speedier and more effectual method of remedying our social and economic grievances than by appealing to Parliament, and possibly waiting ten or twenty years to find that, after all, the grievance has only been half remedied, if at all.

Direct action to-day does not entail the sacrifices requisite two or three hundred years ago, or even fifty years ago. If we really desire the elevation of the whole of humanity there is no force, either

governmental or otherwise, which can withstand us. It is but necessary for us as a people, when we consider a law is inimical to our happiness, to act as if it did not exist. By continually ignoring the laws which are not in harmony with our ideas of truth and justice we can render them null and void long before they could possibly be abolished by parliamentary methods. Just as the force of public opinion has relegated old laws to the dust heap of the ages—laws which have never been abolished—so can we to-day, by our individual and collective action, effectually render inoperative such laws as we consider out of harmony with the spirit of the age and the happiness of the people. There may be suffering, you say, sacrifices to be made. True, but will the sum totality of the suffering inflicted for disobeying laws equal, or nearly equal, the suffering which goes on to-day owing to these unjust laws, to say nothing of the degradation which comes of obeying bad laws. Besides, suffering will only be inflicted when the protesters are few and weak; when a large section of the people range themselves upon their side, the struggle will be won. Whenever the people are convinced upon any particular subject, no more wirepulling need be resorted to; no more years and years of wordy warfare before the will of the people obtains recognisance; the people's desire will be translated into action whenever that desire is formulated. Their opinion, for the first time, will be supreme—will be the real lever which will remove the ills of to-day, and make for happier conditions for all. No Parliament, no referendums are necessary. A law is bad; the people consider it bad. Well, there is no necessity for petitions and speeches if people are really in earnest. Disobey it! disobey it in force, and that law will be heard of no more.

Direct action, after all, simply means that each of us individually must decide for himself the morality or immorality of any course of action; and having decided, to act, or refuse to act, according to the circumstances of the case, and the character of the question involved. No longer will we puzzle our brains with legality and illegality; the simple right or wrong will suffice for us. Our course of action will no longer be influenced by the opinions of other men, except in so far as we ourselves consider desirable. All that we require to do is to set our faces firmly in the direction we desire to travel—the direction of human freedom and happiness. As we are men, and our lawmakers no more, we are quite as competent as they to decide the affairs of life. By this course of action, we rid ourselves of all the lying and cheating, the intriguing and chicanery which is inherent in parliamentary and political life. No longer will our happiness and well-being depend upon any set of men.

By adopting direct action the people themselves can deal directly with this social question, which is perplexing and worrying the best brains of our time. And just as fast as public opinion ripens upon any phase of the social problem, just as soon will that part of it be solved. Don't say we are too weak. The men who formed and sustain our trade unions; the men who by voluntary effort built up that splendid network of co-operative societies, surely are strong enough to carry their work a little farther.

There is a feeling among some co-operators to-day to enter the political arena. If they but considered the splendid work already accomplished without the help of Parliament, they would certainly hesitate on entering a field of action so little productive of good, and so prolific of evil.

Our co-operative societies have nothing to gain from political action. They have much to lose. They can accomplish all that is necessary outside of Parliament far more efficiently. With the tremendous force of public sympathy which they possess it is only necessary for them to say, "This law hampers us, we intend to disregard it in the future," and the law and Government dare not prosecute or in any way attempt to enforce the objectionable law in question, faced as they would be by the determined, awakened public opinion of the country. The Co-operative movement will have an enormous influence on the progress and development of the people when they look upon life and its manifestations from a moral instead of a legal point of view. By doing so, and eschewing Parliament, they will save themselves from much heartburning, wasted hopes, and miserable failure. They will take their place in the van of the forward movement, marching to the conquest of the future.

For the individual the change will be great. Instead of considering his duty accomplished when he crosses a few pieces of paper at long intervals, he will study life for himself, and be prepared to act upon his own conclusions. The remedy being direct, every evil of our time will appeal to him directly. The possibility of removing these evils being within his reach he will no longer look upon them with apathy and indifference. The gulf which to-day separates thought and action will be bridged, and happiness will be the result, for happiness after all lies in the conformity of thought and action.

To achieve our aims, to effect the reforms we consider necessary, and at the same time develop the moral tone, the self-reliance, and the individuality of the people, there need be no violence, no theatrical denouments. Without force, or threats of force, it is but necessary to sit tight, and by sheer weight of dogged determination in refusing to recognise or obey laws which we are convinced are inimical to the life, wellbeing and happiness of the community, we can exert an influence on the public opinion of our time which will relegate these laws to the scrap-heap.

We have but to consider how strong we are, and that all that is necessary to-day to make the changes we desire; to make life worth living; to make it a pleasure where now it is a misery; to bring happiness and mirth where now there is sorrow and tears; to make men and women truly great, glorying in their manhood and womanhood, with the joy of life pulsating through their veins, with intelligence, intellectuality, and nobility of character stamped upon their features, where now we have stunted wretches, sodden in misery, weary of life, destitute of all interest in art or science, with degraded, drink and vice-soiled bodies wasting away to the grave. To make this change all we want is but the WILL. All that Nature lays before us, all that science day by day unfolds to us, all the beauties in art and nature; all these are ours if we have but the energy and determination to seize them.

Cease this playing with golden counters, when the stake too often is the life and happiness of thousands, and interest yourself with the real facts of life. Come out of your cities where, crowded like rabbits in a warren, you never learn the beauties of earth and sky and sea and shore, and the living things upon the earth. Learn to look at the sunlight and breathe the air of freedom away from your fœtid cities with their foul smells of decaying garbage. Learn that Nature is grander and more beautiful than your hovels of brick and stone. Learn that there is a grandeur and beauty in the budding shoots of spring, and in the waving fields of yellow corn, for which your mean and sordid streets can never compensate. Remember above all, that it is life you want, free, full, vibrating, pulsating with vigour, fully developed, physical, emotional, and intellectual, carelessly scattering its gifts around, bringing joy and happiness to your fellows instead of the misery and unrest of to-day. All this life is possible if you have but the will.

THE END.



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